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Bound to History: Leoncia Lasalle's Slave Narrative from Moca, Puerto Rico, 1945

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Abstract: The only slave narrative from Puerto Rico is included in Luis Diaz Soler's *Historia de la esclavitud negra en Puerto Rico* (1953; 2002). This article considers this embedded account as part of the literature of slave narratives to address a gap in the literature; this is perhaps due to the account's singularity and brevity. Beyond this, the other source for understanding the experience of enslaved women in Puerto Rico is through legal and parish documents, generated by a colonial government and church supportive of slavery. As a result, lives under enslavement are quantified statistically, and the lack of oral history or personal accounts hampers understanding of the effects of enslavement from an individual perspective. Documenting such a life comes with its own set of issues, as shown here by demonstrating the limits of various archival resources. There is no one methodology to follow to reconstruct lives and family histories under slavery, an institution designed to prevent the formation of a historical sense of self and agency. Factoring in familial connections makes my own location as a researcher visible, as knowledge is not neutral. Despite its brevity, considering Leoncia Lasalle's account, and that of her daughter, Juana Rodriguez Lasalle, in terms of its multiple contexts—microhistory, similarities with U.S. and Cuban slave narratives, family histories, and the archive—reveals the constructed nature of the idea of historical knowledge, which also has implications for genealogical practice involved with slavery and life post-emancipation.

Keywords: slave narrative; Moca, Puerto Rico; emancipation; archives; historical knowledge; microhistory; genealogical practice

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1. Introduction

In 1945, the historian Luis Diaz Soler interviewed Dionicia Leoncia Lasalle, then 112 years old, and her daughter, Juana Rodriguez Lasalle, age 85, in Barrio Pueblo, Moca about their experiences under bondage. I offer a context for the account, along with details from archival records that both trace their family history and fill in additional details about their lives. This oral history of slavery in Moca survives within the pages of Luis Diaz Soler's *Historia de la esclavitud negra en Puerto Rico*, the first extensive study focused on the history of slavery on the island. "I was raised on the hacienda of don Marcelino Lasalle, way out in the countryside of Moca ... " (Diaz-Soler 2002) is how Leoncia Lasalle begins her account of enslavement in Northwest Puerto Rico, which for her began well over a century before.

Although the account is brief, voiced is an experience that occurred during the nineteenth century and is one also shared by tens of thousands of people. However, published personal accounts of the slave experience in Puerto Rico are extremely rare—with only one known example from the island—and that forms part of Leoncia Lasalle's legacy. Even more uncommon is that this account is from a centenarian, and it is also in part her daughter's, so that two women testify to their experience of enslavement right after the Second World War. By centering their perspectives, another personal history becomes visible. Yet recovering the details of her life from documents is not a simple task.

In this paper, I discuss the availability of archives and the demands of genealogical documentation, the local and family history in terms of the context of testimony and ultimately provide a translation of Lasalle's brief slave narrative. By bringing together oral histories and genealogical data, one can begin to go beyond the limits of the statistical count of enslaved persons to understand their lives, families, and the constraints of colorism and racial hierarchies, struggles for status, and resilience under a system hinged on freedom versus non-freedom (Negron Portillo and Mayo Santana 2007). The question of identity is neither a straightforward or guaranteed process of unfolding categories, all buried under the weight of a declared supremacy, ultimately defined as "*blanco*"—white—and potentially buried by time through the threat of deteriorating archives. Her own historical becoming is limited by the nature of the state and its control over archives, laws that shape our understanding of history. Recognizing that historical knowledge is also state knowledge reveals how this shifting system of prescribed identities works to obscure processes of agency and exploitation and the choices navigated through the recorded voices of mother and daughter. (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1986).

2. Testifying on Slavery, Living People, and Archival Resources

What I set out to do in this article is to trace the family history of Dionicia Leoncia Lasalle and her daughter, Juana Rodriguez Lasalle, and offer a context for the account, along with details from archival records that fill in additional details. As Pinderhughes noted four decades ago, working with enslaved ancestors is time consuming work that features an enormous discrepancy between the time and the archives needed to trace the lineage of those enslaved versus the enslaver (Pinderhughes 1982). In the documents that hold Dionicia Leoncia Lasalle's identity, she used both first names for separate documents—in the oral history in Diaz Soler's book she is Leoncia Lasalle, and in vital records and the census, her name varies, appearing as Dionicia or Leoncia or Leonicia Lasalle. Documentation is scant. Her surname retains the spelling favored by the slave holding family, the Lasalles, who have lived in the rural area of Barrio Capa since their arrival in Puerto Rico in the early 1800s. The enslaving family, with roots in the mountainous Basque region of France, escaped the uprising in Saint-Domingue before escaping to Baltimore and settling in Puerto Rico. There they established plantations. Over time, the spelling of Lasalle eventually winds up as Lassalle in contemporary and later records, as variation became more the rule than the exception. Diaz Soler kept it simple by listening and communicating the mother and daughter's oral history in his book, and its publication kept the narrative alive. See Figure 1.

Sixty years later, in 2005, I met one of Leoncia's descendants, her granddaughter, Virginia Arocho Rodriguez (1920–2007), while doing research under a Smithsonian Latino Studies grant on *mundillo* in Moca. *Mundillo* is the practice of handmade bobbin lace, an industry with a complex history tied to labor, race and social status. (Fernandez-Sacco 2019a) Virginia, or "Viña" as she was known, told me of her burning desire to become a lacemaker in her youth. She related how, unable to afford straight pins, she used the long thorns of an orange tree to hold the turns of her lace in place. Ultimately, when she returned to live on the island after living in New York City, she learned how to make lace with the master lacemakers of Moca. Viña was part of the resuscitation of *mundillo* in Northwest Puerto Rico during the 1970s. I learned of multiple family connections too. Guillermina "Conchita" Lopez (1926–2000), a cousin of mine, was among Virginia's main teachers of *mundillo*. During her childhood, Viña's stepsister was a daughter of my great-aunt, who died suddenly of typhoid in Barrio Pueblo, Moca. As the child's mother lived near Leoncia Lasalle and her family, she wound up living with them after she was orphaned at age 4, a time of informal adoption in the midst of overlapping pandemics. Illnesses like typhoid and tuberculosis took many lives, reshaping families overnight in this small rural area. The situation shows the accommodation and variety of family ties within a small town, its connections extended by a network of obligations and relationships shaped by economies tied to sugar and slavery. As Viña died not long after our interviews, I worked on learning more about her family by researching her genealogy and via census and vital records, and I found her connection to Dionicia Leoncia Lasalle, information I shared with them. Even on a local level, disconnection from an ancestor's ties to the history of slavery can happen over time. By foregrounding her voice and

that of her daughter, these first-person accounts become a means of "understanding the labor regimes enforced on the formerly enslaved by the same propertied interests", rather than a text that marks a triumph of abolition (Peabody 2012). The enslaver's ability to sell a person off to pay a debt, order the enslaved to work to the point of exhaustion, or sexually abuse them are all features of this account.



Figure 1. Virginia Arocho Rodriguez (1920–2007), granddaughter of Leoncia Lasalle, November 2005, Moca, Puerto Rico. Interview arranged by Benito "Mokay" Hernandez Vale, Director, Museo del Mundillo Puertorriqueno, Moca, PR. Photo taken by author, November 2005.

3. Leoncia Lasalle's Slave Narrative, Moca, Puerto Rico, 1945

> "I was raised on the hacienda of don Marcelino Lasalle, way out in the countryside of Moca. I worked in cane since I was very little. I got up at four am like everyone else to work until late in the night. At dinner time, we were brought root vegetables and salt cod. And we returned to chop cane until seven, more or less. At that hour, we ate flour with beans and if we were lucky, a little rice, although almost always there was a thin stew (*sancocho ralo*) and boiled plantain. Afterwards, we threw ourselves down to sleep from exhaustion and fatigue.
>
> Don Marcelino was obsessed with gambling. That man had a head for nothing else. He lost one game in a bad way and then ceded me to pay the debt. By chance I got an abusive, immoral owner, don Soto Rosado of Lares. He was so bad that for burning long corn fritters I was frying, he ordered that they give me the pallet as punishment. If that was for burning some corn fritters, imagine what the punishment would be for burning his shirt while ironing!
>
> By luck or by misfortune, this don Soto sold me to don Manuel Gonzalez for 100 pesos. I came cheap, because I already knew how to do everything, in the cane field and in the house. Don Manuel's son, seeing me so young and developed, took advantage of me and did the damage. That's the way it was then: one had to placate the master over everything he bothered about to avoid conflict. I became pregnant and had a fine-looking girl, know that for sure. He gave her a lot of attention. For that, I thank him. Favors are always acknowledged.
>
> Other Black women impregnated by whites made claims and it was as if they were never with them! In the end, they were the ones who had to support and raise their children.

> And that's why I never made claims on them. What is given is what one wants to give or if it is not, then don't give me anything. The one thing I would have wanted was freedom for me and for my daughter. And that he never gave us ... "
>
> Juana Rodriguez Lasalle, daughter of Leoncia Lasalle, former slave of don Marcelino Lasalle ... Leonicia stated that "at four in the morning, everyone was already up to start work. At six, the mayordomo blew the conch, and everyone came out to work, and at seven at night, he played it again to go to dinner.
>
> They testified that on said hacienda the owner offered for meals: root vegetables and one and a half of a long corn fritter. Those *soruyos* were like my arm, and later a piece of roasted salt cod ... in the afternoon, they gave us flour cooked with beans, and sometimes they would give rice. What we ate the most was a thin stew and plantains, roasted or boiled." ...
>
> (Diaz-Soler 2002).

The original Spanish text from Diaz Soler is in Appendix A.

Patterns of Slave Narratives: What She Said

Although brief, Leoncia Lasalle's account follows a number of the conventions for slave narratives in the Black American literary tradition that fits a master outline. It includes some of the twelve elements for "the actual narrative", as outlined by scholar James Olney in 1985, that goes from a first sentence beginning "I was born" to include the various cruelties, details about food, labor, the commonplace nature of sexual assault, and reflections on enslavement (Olney 1985).[1]

Together, Leoncia Lasalle and Juana Rodriguez Lasalle also told Diaz Soler about an instance of retaliation by a slave holder who ordered his slave to plant some coconut palms. The enslaved man jokingly pointed out that given the long time that coconut palms took to grow, his owner would never get to eat them. Insulted, the owner ordered the man whipped, because he dared to mistrust God, who had given his health in the first place. He accused the enslaved of having negated the wish for good health that would allow him to eat from the coconut palms that were planted (Diaz-Soler 2002). Although this portion of their narrative appears in a footnote, it blends both the convention of a hardworking enslaved man with that of an oppressive enslaver's Christianity that exemplifies the threats to life and to reason itself through the system of slavery, in keeping with Olney's elements (Olney 1985).

Within Diaz Soler's discussion about the nature of labor, speed of work, harvest, laws to prohibit work for females inconsistent with their sex, age and physical hardiness also illustrate the gap between the prescription of law and the reality on the ground. He included Leoncia Lasalle's account of rape at the hands of one owner's son, and she names the perpetrator to a point, as the son of Don Manuel Gonzalez, member of the older plantation owning families in barrio Capa, whose descendants were very much alive in 1945. This account is an experience shared by thousands of women under bondage,

1 The full list of elements is: "1. a first sentence beginning "I was born.." then specifying a place but not a date of birth; 2. a sketchy account of parentage, often involving a white father; 3. description of a cruel master, mistress, or overseer, details of first observed whipping and numerous subsequent whippings, with women very frequently the victims; 4. an account of one extraordinarily strong, hardworking slave—often pure African, who, because there is no reason for it, refuses to be whipped; 5. record of the barriers raised against slave literacy and the overwhelming difficulties encountered in learning to read and write; 6. description of a "Christian" slaveholder (often of one such dying in terror) and the accompanying claim that "Christian" slave holders are invariably worse than those professing no religion; 7. description of the amounts and kinds of food and clothing given to slaves, the work required of them, the pattern of a day, a week, a year; 8. account of a slave auction, of families being separated and destroyed, of distraught others clinging to their children as they are torn from them, of slave coffles being driven south; 9. descriptions of patrols, of failed attempt(s) to escape, of pursuit by men and dogs; 10. description of successful attempt(s) to escape, lying by during the day, traveling by night guided by the North Star, reception in a free state by Quakers who offer a lavish breakfast and much genial thee/thou conversation; 11. taking of a new last name (frequently one suggested by a white abolitionist) to accord with new social identity as a free man, but retention of first name as a mark of continuity of individual identity: 12. reflections of slavery." (Olney 1985).

underlined by her comments that speak to the lack of redress for violation and sexual exploitation. She also mentions the punishment invoked for minor infractions, such as burning the *sorrullos* (a long corn fritter) for the slave holder. Paddling was also a punishment practiced in the U.S. South as this 1845 engraving from an anti-slavery text shows. What the illustration below makes clear is how this punishment was administered, with the subject bound to a stake, and struck on the rump with a pallet made of wood with holes that raised blisters that broke the skin with each blow. The fence defines an inner yard that reinforces the slave holder's idea of personal justice meted out, a generational warning as the scene is witnessed by a Black child who wipes their tears as they hear the woman's screams. The punishment of the pallet survives in a memory of Don Soto Rosado told a century later. See Figure 2.



Common mode of whipping with the paddle.

Figure 2. Common mode of whipping with the paddle. "Paddling a Slave, U.S. South, 1845" Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora, accessed 31 July 2020, http://slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/1255.

Children were defined by terms that worked to set them apart from those used for children from the families that enslaved them. Diaz Soler notes the terms used for enslaved children by age, *muleco*, derived from the Portuguese "*moleque*" or "*molequos*" meaning "pickaninny" or "brat". The terms "*muleco*" or "*muleque*" were applied for ages 6–12 and "*mulecones*" for ages 12–18 (Diaz-Soler 2002). The fact that their humanity was obscured and instead defined through stereotypes enabled the justification for the use of violence against them. Vocabulary underscored the divides created by social hierarchies that aimed to both structure and separate the enslaved as they transitioned to freedom.

Most of the conventions for the slave narrative outlined by Olney—particularly 1–5, 7, and 12—figure prominently in this brief account. It would be interesting to know more about Diaz Soler's own knowledge and understanding of slave narratives, and if they prompted his questions for mother and daughter. Indeed, within his text, Diaz Soler relied on the Lasalle women's oral history as a cord that ties past and present. Aside from the main testimony, he uses their accounts to verify earlier accounts of Puerto Rican slavery by nineteenth century writers such as Dario Ormachea. Yet their connection to community and family post-slavery was not engaged. Diaz Soler's failure to deal with the afterlife of enslavement in the context of the present was a missed opportunity to connect to the social constraints that continued in the decades after 1870.

4. Challenges, Collections, and Preservation: Slavery and Documentation in Puerto Rico

The challenges of researching relatives under slavery in Puerto Rico are multiple. The nature of documentation itself is problematic—while there are statistics, these are limited in terms of providing insight into family structures and lives caught within the social hierarchy of enslavement. Tropical conditions are not conducive to preservation in general, so that natural disasters, insects, and selective neglect have at times done their worst. In the past, some pilfered parish documents to keep their identities of color suppressed, and during the early nineteenth century, others paid for the recognition of certain identities that bound class to whiteness and pushed African and Indigenous identities aside. Basically, three primary sources for enslaved individuals exist: parish records, notarial documents, and slave inventories taken by municipality. Such documents include the slave inventory of 1826 (Nieves Mendez 2008) and the *cedulas* (printed entry forms) prepared for the *Registro de Esclavos* of 1870. *The cedulas* were compiled into the volumes of the *Registro de Esclavos*. Unfortunately, the volume that would include the records for Northwest Puerto Rico is lost, but the individual *cedulas* exist in varying states of decay, unindexed. I undertook transcription of 492 *cedulas* that comprise one set of documents to reconstruct a portion of the volume, yet some 1200–2200 *cedulas* can make up one volume. The intent is to help descendants to connect with enslaved ancestors (Fernandez-Sacco 2019a). Unfortunately, these small records for Leoncia Lasalle and Juana Rodriguez Lasalle were not in this set of documents. This is a fairly bare bones form that supplies details that are not necessarily precise—an age, location of birth, facial details, skin color, parent, names of children, possibly a partner, type of labor, and the name of the owner.

Consider that while Puerto Rico's total number of enslaved people never reached the scale of Cuba or Brazil, the nineteenth century Puerto Rican economy remained dependent on a combination of slave labor and peonage. However, the total percentages of enslaved and free African descended blended populations for the Caribbean islands, United States, and Brazil vary considerably during the nineteenth century. Puerto Rico had a highly admixed population, with steadily decreasing numbers of Africans after the start of the nineteenth century. Africans were imported infrequently, often from other Caribbean islands, and varied in terms of geographic origins and ethnicities (Stark 2015). After 1808, the number of free and enslaved admixed people increased, yet sales in both the legal and illegal slave trade continued until 1873, which suggests that potential discrepancies in the total numbers exist. Despite a process of gradual abolition in Puerto Rico, nearly 32,000 people remained in bondage in 1872. By that time, Leoncia Lassalle was already 34 years old.

Archives, Conditions, and Refusals

For a time, Leoncia Lasalle and her daughter Juana, like many freedmen and women, worked the same jobs as when they were enslaved. They were required by law to supply three years of free labor to their former employers as a term of emancipation in 1870. Among the documentation that may include them is the *Libreta de Jornaleros* (Notebook of Day Laborers) that began in 1849. Many of the free men and women were incorporated into the regimented work of agricultural day laborers or *jornaleros*. The regime of the *Libreta de Jornaleros* was an obligatory work detail to press those who didn't own land into work, growing and processing the island's export crops, rather than attempting to live off the land in subsistence mode.

In seeking to harness the labor of the landless, this system used a logbook and notebook system to keep track of the laborers. The parallels between the bureaucratic technology of enslavement (logbook and notebook) and that of compulsory labor also resulted in the creation of *cedulas*, the forms used to enter information for these workers whether free or unfree (Negron Portillo and Mayo Santana 2007). Perhaps the resemblance between the forms for the free and the *cedulas* for the enslaved cut too close. There are accounts of towns such as Lares that literally burned some of the notebooks, which perhaps created a sense of freedom through the absence of the *Libretas*.

For the formerly enslaved after 1873, freedom was a condition visibly defined as they were noted as "*libertas*" or "*libertos*" (literally "freedwoman" or "freedman") to distinguish their surnames from

those of their former enslavers. "*Liberto*" can also appear as a middle name, or even as a surname. Few plantation record sets have survived intact, if at all, yet logbooks tracking the labor and output of the enslaved likely existed. In terms of the documentation, the perspectives that survive are largely those of the enslavers, political supporters of slavery, and abolitionists, making Leoncia Lassalle's words even more valuable as a testimony of conditions directly from her experience of enslavement.

Taken overall, precisely how much archival material was lost is unclear, visible in the poor condition of "*Libros de Negros y Pardos*" (literally "Books of Blacks and Browns"), the separate volumes of parish records for enslaved and free people of African, Indigenous, or Afro-Indigenous descent in the 1820s. The few volumes that survive are in worse condition than the parish volumes. While the 1820s saw a heightening of the terms that defined identity, by the 1850s this changed. The practice of separate books stopped, and enslaved persons were recorded along with everyone else in the parish registers.

Separate baptismal books were kept at two parishes, *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios* in San Juan and *San Francisco de Asis de Aguada* in Northwest Puerto Rico (Ordonez Mercado 2013). At San Juan's *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios*, separate books for baptism date from 1672–1838; the notation of volumes as "B" (*Blancos*) past those dates show that the accompanying books for BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) baptisms did not survive. The marriage volumes at *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios* marked "P"(*Pardos*) are only four in number, and date from 1734–1818 (Rodriguez Leon 1986a). At Aguada's *San Francisco de Asis*, separate books were maintained for baptisms between 1834–1853, and one volume of marriages, 1810–1851 (Rodriguez Leon 1986b). There are more parishes, with three extant baptismal volumes from *San Carlos Borromeo de Aguadilla* marked "P" (*Pardos*). Another twelve extant baptismal volumes for *Pardos y Esclavos* from San Felipe Apostol de Arecibo and two volumes of baptisms for San Fernando Rey de Toa Alta were kept (Rodriguez Leon 1986c). Accessing the baptismal records for Leoncia Lasalle and her daughter is compounded by record losses, for the volumes that would have recorded their baptisms at *Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Monserrate* in Moca are lost for the years 1821–1859 and 1870–1893 (Rodriguez Leon 1986d).

From the seventeenth century to the first half of the nineteenth century, whether in the colonial center or the more rural outposts going west, the church was the demographic resource whose records insured that social distinctions were maintained. This points to a differential level of care for records for enslaved people; thus, much more research across a variety of record sets is required to gather sufficient information to rebuild a family history for these ancestors. Before 1885, parish records are colonial documents and slave holders' records that make "glimpses into the microworlds of the persons involved . . . rare." Embedded in the use of multiple names are various strategies and social transitions that result from the accumulation of a lifetime of relationships (Abel et al. 2019). Thus, given the losses of volumes of baptismal records, the account by these two women is an even more precious resource for understanding their lives under slavery.

Perhaps the greatest hurdle to access are the *protocolos notariales.* Sales of enslaved people were recorded in the pages of various notary records. These consist of a series of hundreds of volumes of notary documents, which are still regarded as living documents, housed at the Archivo General de Puerto Rico (AGPR) in San Juan (Blanco and Ramos 2018). Rather than declare a window of time that facilitates access to documents over 75–100 years old, these volumes remain "alive", although the land rights may be long extinguished and the families in them long gone. Notarial documents can afford more detail than a parish record, as the entries for each person sold or inherited can include information such as age, appearance, occupation, situation, additional family members, origin, and *coartación* (payment for freedom), data often not accessible elsewhere. Whenever possible, sources need to be triangulated to confirm the identity of the enslaved: the *cedula*, the notary documents, parish records and the vital records of the *Registro Civil* help to bridge the details of ancestral lives between enslavement and emancipation. The question then becomes, where would they be listed, since Leoncia Lasalle's account describes being turned over to another local enslaver to satisfy the debt from a game of cards? There were many informal arrangements undertaken that could potentially escape being recorded, arrangements that were made without the payment of fees to a notary.

Post slavery is a time period that covers the overlap between the extent of gradual abolition from 1870–1872, and slavery's official end in Puerto Rico in 1886, a year after the start of the Civil Register of 1885. While digitalization would be the best option for preservation of many document series at the AGPR (*Archivo General de Puerto Rico*), the institution is itself underfunded and negatively impacted by the damage wreaked by Hurricane Maria in 2017. They have recently received some NEH funding to improve conditions and install a better climate control system. There is also the larger problem of "document drain", which results in the loss of cultural heritage archives by expropriation (by former colonial powers) or by donation or purchase, which brings questions of access along with moral and ethical issues to bear on what survives. Documents rescued from dumpsters or personal collections also come up for sale on eBay. This quandary of document drain is not Puerto Rico's alone—it is a problem shared by the United States and by former European colonial metropolises (Ramos 2009; Zack 2011). Various institutional problems exist with collections located stateside. These situations also raise questions about access and the terms of its provision. For example, the digitalization of the Puerto Rican Civil Court Document collection contains some 5000 pages of court documents dating from 1844–1900 from Arecibo, Barceloneta, Camuy, Ciales, Hatillo, Manati, Morovis, Quebradillas, and Utuado, originally purchased by the University of Connecticut from an antiquarian book dealer in 2000. While the papers are available digitally, there was no funding for the indexing of contents, and today, the Digital Collections Portal at UConn is no longer running. Released into the public sphere and freely accessible, these huge PDFs are difficult to download without a high internet speed, and are presently on the Internet Archive site (archive.org). The collection is in need of further transcription and contextualization for better use by genealogists, family historians, historians, and anyone else working on these regions. Questions remain as to who will pursue this work and who will make it more accessible. Whether there were cases relating to slavery contained within these pages is anyone's guess.

Insufficient funding and cuts have plagued the *Archivo General de Puerto Rico* (AGPR) for decades, and its organization has been revamped several times over the years. However, "the AGPR is the general/national archive with the lowest number of archivists in Latin America and the Caribbean." This fact, paired with the "ignorance or negligence" of government administrations over what modern archives are, then becomes a barrier for accountability and record keeping practices. (Blanco and Ramos 2018; Castro Arroyo 1990) Despite this pressure, the AGPR belongs to a project of digitization of primary sources for public distribution, the *Archivo Digital Nacional de Puerto Rico* (ADNPR.net). The Sociedad Puertorriqueña de Genealogia contributes by publishing volumes of parish transcriptions and the third volume of their *Collection de Genealogia e historia: La aportacion de las naciones africanas a la familia puertorriqueña* (2012), which helps the research process on enslaved ancestors through its essays and 10,677 mini-biographies. However, more remains to be done.

Ultimately, laboring families caught in the socioeconomic machine of enslavement and its aftermath pose numerous challenges for the genealogist, as these relationships are constrained by status, overshadowed by landowners, administrators and the law. As for the records themselves, there is no one central archive for recuperating data on slavery in Puerto Rico, and its current colonial status can enable it to be excluded from various stateside projects, despite increasing evidence, via DNA, that the bounds of enslavement were not enough to shear connections that cross oceans and continents. Turning to the landscape of where Leoncia Lassalle and her daughter Juana Rodriguez labored is another means of understanding the context of their lives. As is true for much work on the enslaved, the records of the slave holder need to be reviewed for clues on the people they held in bondage.

5. The Landscape of Enslavement: Late Eighteenth to Early Nineteenth Century Moca, Puerto Rico

Moca, founded in 1772, is located at the end of a *cordillera, a* small mountain range that sweeps from west to east along the northern side of the island, an area well suited for coffee and sugarcane cultivation. With the subdivision of the *hatos* (open range ranches) between the mid-eighteenth to start of the nineteenth century, the growth of farms and haciendas expanded as the economy shifted from

military outpost to commercial agriculture for export (Cosme-Arroyo 2009; Stark 2015). This shift reshaped the structure of enslavement, as did the phasing out of the importation of enslaved Africans to the growth of an internal slave trade after 1834 (Stark 2015). This was the decade in which Leoncia Lasalle was born. See Figure 3.



Figure 3. Location of Moca, Puerto Rico. Based on File: USA Puerto Rico location map.svg made by NordNordWest, highlighted by Dr. Blofeld—Based on File: USA Puerto Rico location map.svg.

In nineteenth to mid-twentieth century Moca, the ward (*barrio*) was a rural area subdivided into small and large plantations; today a barrio can contain housing subdivisions and some farms. The port of Aguadilla, through which many emigrants from Saint Domingue/Haiti arrived during the early to mid-1800s, lies about five miles west of Barrio Pueblo; to the east are Isabela, San Sebastian, and Lares, which figure in the larger history of Lasalles and Lassalles, enslaved and free. The spelling of the surname goes back and forth over time, beginning as Lasalle and becoming Lassalle across different documents.

As with the history of slavery, there is more archival material on the Lassalles who owned people than on the people they held in bondage. The investment in plantations by the Lassalles began at the turn of the eighteenth century in Jeremie, Saint-Domingue. By the end of the 1700s, the family fled the uprising in Saint-Domingue, in which thousands hurriedly left the island. As the political situation in France shifted, the enslaved population pushed for freedom in violent clashes. Between 1793–1798, thousands arrived in port cities along the eastern seaboard seeking refuge. Over 15,000—closer to 20,000—refugees arrived in Louisiana alone. This multiracial St Domingan diaspora stretched from the islands of the Greater Antilles to New Orleans and north to the ports of Baltimore, New York, and Boston. Every phase of processing coffee and sugar for a world market was arrested; the blood that went into the production was momentarily stopped. Fortunes were lost, and French refugees moved to different cities with a view to determine their future, some returning to the same extractive economy in another location (Childs 1940; Dessens 2007). Within the decade, some returned to the Caribbean and settled in Puerto Rico.

The Lassalles and the people they owned moved in this flow, going from St. Domingue to Baltimore, New Orleans, and Puerto Rico. Their arrival in these locations was not simultaneous, and the precise economic relationship between two Lassalle brothers who relocated to Puerto Rico is unclear. What is clear is that the enslaved comprised the heart of their fortune, and both men possessed business knowledge and skills that they applied to their advantage. They drew from a network of French expatriates, many of whom were from the same geographic region who invested as small groups in the project of sugar plantations and the minor crops used to support them. Unlike some refugees, the Lasalles managed to hold on to their wealth as they moved.

Together with family and a number of enslaved persons, Jean Baptiste Lassalle Lafarguete (according to notarial documents from Guaynabo) left his family business in Guarico [Cap Haitien] and first went to Baltimore with two cousins who died there in 1794. He was a half owner of a cattle and foodstuffs farm in Ouanaminthe (Juanamendez) along the Massacre River that defined the border between French and Spanish Santo Domingo (Gliech 2020a). By 1801, he arrived in Puerto Rico,

recorded as Juan Bautista Lasalle, with 52 enslaved persons (Nieves Mendez 2008; Borja de Zsaszdi 1992; Szazdi Nagy 2002; Rosario Rivera 1995). He invested in a plantation in Guaynabo, *La Pastora*, and became a partner or *socio* in a company that pooled resources for large purchases of property (human, material, and land) that served as both cash and as labor.

Lasalle advanced 15,000 pesos to Captain Jose Zevallos to purchase lands and establish a mill, homes, enslaved people, animals, and "whatever is needed to establish a hacienda." Zevallos was in business with the French physician Luis Raiffer, who purchased the Herrainz farm in Rio Piedras in December 1799 and still owed the balance in 1801. On behalf of Lasalle, Zevallos bought up land from a number of people within the community: the parish priest Fr. Jose Ximenez, a man named Garcia, Antonio Diaz, and Diaz' sister in law; he also purchased land from Paula Garcia, a Hernandez, and a Franquiz to make up a plantation with buildings, worked by more than 60 enslaved people, 21 oxen, and so forth. Human labor, animals, and structures were all needed and bought to process sugar cane, which was the most hazardous phase of the crop. Well situated, this traffic of people and materials was facilitated by the plantation's proximity to the river that ran between Guaynabo and Bayamon. *La Pastora* was valued 30,000 pesos, an incredibly large sum for the time (Szazdi Nagy 2002). This series of transactions, large and small, that led to the formation and establishment of the plantation were done without the use of a bank, with loan obligations recorded by a notary public (Szazdi 1962).

Meanwhile, in Northwest Puerto Rico, the first decade of the 1800s saw a number of plantation owners from Haiti, Santo Domingo, and France establish themselves in and around the wards of Moca, Puerto Rico (Nieves Mendez 2008). Juan Bautista Lasalle's brother Pedro Maria Lassalle Lafarguete purchased land and started a plantation in Barrio Rocha, Moca. Pedro Maria Lassalle's crops were largely based in coffee, which unlike sugar cultivation and processing did not require an intensive investment in machinery and labor. The timing of their arrival turned out to be an advantage, as a market for agricultural export of luxury crops now opened after the disruptions and uprisings in Saint Domingue, and in Puerto Rico, eight new towns were founded just a decade before in 1799 (Steward 1956, pp. 50–51).

Slave imports and economic expansion went hand in hand. The communal use of land as *hatos* was ended, and these large swaths of land formerly used for grazing became *estancias*—farms and plantations with private owners. Historian Laird Bergad noted that "in 1780 the French were licensed to trade in slaves with Puerto Rico, provided a 6 percent import duty was paid to Crown officials. Finally in 1789, because of the continued demand for labor by commercial farmers, all traders, Spanish or foreign, were permitted to trade in slaves duty-free" (Bergad 1983). Africans introduced to the island, whether brought via the *Asiento* (government licensed slave dealers) or by smuggling, remained part of the social fabric of multiple plantations and municipalities in early nineteenth century Puerto Rico.

Market Expansion after the Real Cedula de Gracias, 1815

An active market, the growth of towns, and contraband, along with a legal and illegal slave trade, constituted part of the backdrop for plantation-based families of the nineteenth century. This economy and the newly emigrated families merged with older military families, tied to an earlier phase of the hato economy more directly tied to the African slave trade. By 1815, alarmed by the browning of the population, Spain issued a policy, the *Real Cedula de Gracias* (Royal Decree of Concessions), focused on increasing the number of European investors to its colonies. Refugees from French Saint Domingue and Irish immigrants who arrived in Northwest Puerto Rico invested in coffee and sugar (Bergad 1983).

Members of the Lasalle family benefited under the provisions of the *Real Cedula de Gracias* and applied for their letters of domicile (*carta de domicilio*) that recognized them as Spanish subjects (Fernandez-Sacco 2019a). This larger political context shaped what was to come. Under the passage of the *Real Cedula de Gracias*, the demand for reforms by residents and colonial officials resulted in demographic and economic expansion through foreign investment. At the same time, Spain wanted to keep its colonies from joining in the independence movements tearing across South America. Slavery was seen as a necessity, as the island's peasant population, made up of free people of color,

lived a mobile existence, resisting the ideal of a ready labor force for the plantation. This population had a high admixture of Indigenous, Afro-Indigenous, and African descended people, later extrapolated into the figure of the *jibaro*, the idealized, dark- and straight-haired, and light skinned agricultural worker or peasant (Figueroa 2005). The enslaved were regarded as an interchangeable piece in the machine that was the plantation, their humanity negated by the market for goods. See Figure 4.



Figure 4. Location of Guaynabo, Puerto Rico. The 82-mile distance between Moca and Guaynabo was easily bridged by ship (later steamer) to the port of Aguadilla. Equirectangular projection, N/S stretching 105 %. Map by Based on File: USA Puerto Rico location map.svg made by NordNordWest, highlighted by Dr. Blofeld—Based on File: USA Puerto Rico location map.svg, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10946699.

The land grants of the Royal Decree of 1815 meant an emigre received about seven acres in land grants and another 3/4 acre per enslaved person who entered the island with his or her enslaver. They also gained a 15-year tax exemption, naturalization after five years of residence, and "the duty-free importation of capital, stores and agricultural and construction equipment." These policies remained in effect until 1830 (Figueroa 2005). This arrangement contributed to the development of the plantation economy. This was an economic reward for the colony's loyalty to the Crown at a time when Spanish American independence movements intensified (Kinsbruner 1996). Efforts were made to keep ideas of independence out of the ports that received emigres from St. Domingue and Venezuela. Some 1107 people arrived in Puerto Rico from St Domingue with their enslaved, children, and wives. There were 367 that came into the port of Mayaguez and 199 into San Juan and its surrounding area. As Juan Bautista Lassalle entered Puerto Rico with 54 enslaved people, this meant he received some 46 acres, which expanded his business even further in Guaynabo, just outside of Bayamon, an intensive sugar producing area. Unlike many who fled the uprising, this ability to hold on to his human property and arrange investments meant that in his case, some archives survived the destruction that established his wealth existed (Rosario Rivera 2015; Rosario Rivera 1995).

The Lasalle family's relationship to slavery was complex. Juan Bautista married at least once, first to Linda Darryballer with whom he had a daughter, Eugenia. She died before 1804, when he put his daughter Eugenia in the care of his sisters in Arens, France. Next, with Maria Barbara Camax, he had a son in 1794 in the parish of Ouanaminthe (also known as Juanamaria), a town near the border of Santo Domingo. The scant documentation does not answer whether his second wife was a well-to-do free person of color, a former slave, or European creole from Ouanaminthe. Juan Bautista Pedro Lasalle, their son, was baptized in the capital city of Santo Domingo in October 1794.[2] Juan Bautista Lasalle's enslaved wet-nurse Francisca Sylvie, born in Guinea, was granted freedom for raising his son Juan Bautista Pedro in 1804. Two years earlier he freed another woman, Francisca, about 28 years old,

[2] "República Dominicana, bautismos, 1726–1924", database, *FamilySearch* (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FL3L-4VD: 17 December 2019), Maria Barbara Camax in entry for Juan Bautista Pedro Lassalle, 1794.

born in Guarico (Cap Haitien), St. Domingue, who purchased her own freedom in October 1802 in Guaynabo. (Borja de Zsaszdi 1992). Some additional information on the Lasalles can be gleaned from a database of archival materials relating to the attempt to secure losses from the investments in land and people in Saint-Domingue (Gliech 2020a, 2020b). Many records from Saint-Domingue were also lost, which make the notarial records at the AGPR a particularly valuable source of information, even if only accessible as footnotes in articles by historians Dora Borja de Zsazdi and Adam Szazdi. Lasalle also served in the urban militia, the *Compania de Milicias Urbanas* for Guyanabo, and retired by 1817.[3] Ultimately in January 1821, Juan Bautista Lasalle Lafarguete died age 60, in Guaynabo.[4]

Details for Juan Bautista Lasalle contrast with an even greater lack of available documents for his brother Pedro Lasalle Lafarguete and his wife, Isabel Victoria Delpeche (born about 1785) of Haiti. Pedro and Isabel had eight children—seven boys and one girl in Moca, Puerto Rico. Like his brother, Pedro Lasalle also served in the local urban militia of Moca and retired the same year, in 1817. These retirements establish that both men had reached 60 years of age by then, and it is unclear who was the elder sibling.[5] How were their substantial inheritances divided? Questions remain as to whether the documents survive. This is partly because the series of notarial documents before 1830, if extant, are often rendered inaccessible due to condition issues today. While historians Borja Zszadi and Szasdi cite a series of notary documents on the Lasalles by the notary Gregorio Sanchez from 1801–1804 in their publications on French emigres in Puerto Rico, these were examined in 1992 and 2002. It remains a question as to whether these can still be consulted at the Archivo General de Puerto Rico today. Whether any surviving documentation makes mention of Leoncia Lasalle and her daughter remains to be seen.

By 1816, Pedro Lasalle received his certificate of residency from the Spanish colonial government; his wife Isabel Victoria Delpeche's lack of documentation makes it impossible to know when she arrived in Puerto Rico from Haiti. Neither she nor her parents are among the list of emigres under the *Real Cedula de Gracias*.[6] His plantation, *Hacienda San Rafael* (later *Hacienda Palmar Llano*), was in Barrio Rocha, up on the rising slopes of the cordillera. This cooler environment in the foothills was well suited for coffee cultivation, and initially, much of the acreage went uncultivated. This soon changed as his family grew. Of his eight children with Isabel Victoria Delpeche, only two appear in extant documents: his first son, Marcelino Maria Engracia, born about 1805 in the Dominican Republic, and a daughter, Saturnina Clothilde Lassalle Delpeche, born about 1820 in Puerto Rico. She married Julian Lopez Pitrat (1815–1886), born in Lyons, another French emigre who settled in Barrio Rocha. He served as *Alcalde* (Mayor) of Moca in 1862, and the couple had two children (Nieves Mendez 2008). They too were enslavers, integral parts of the military, economic, and governmental functions of the municipality.

Saturnina's older brother, Marcelino Maria Engracia Lassalle Delpeche (bca 1805–bef 1874), became the owner of *Hacienda Palmar Llano* in Barrio Rocha, and this is who Leoncia Lassalle mentions at the outset of her account. He had children with Segunda Bonilla o Lassalle, born in the Dominican Republic, in probably about 1809; the death certificate for their son Juan Antonio Lassalle identifies him as "hijo natural reconocido de Don Marcelino Lassalle y Segunda Lassalle, ambos difuntos." Officially married to Maria Celestina "Martina" Bourdon Zavala, the couple had ten children. Among his

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3 "D. Juan Bautista Lasalle, Reformados y Jubilados Blancos." Caja 460, Serie: Municipalidades—Caguas, Guaynabo, 15 November 1817. Fondo de Gobernadores Españoles Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Listas de Milicias Urbanas revisado, Sociedad Puertorriqueña de Genealogía. As militia retirees are 60 or over, there may be a discrepancy with age for Juan Bautista Lassalle at the time of his death in 1821.

4 Juan Bautista Lasalle, Death Record. Defunciones, 20 January 1821 F209v #10, San Pedro Martir de Guaynabo, Arquidiócesis de San Juan. Catholic Church Records, 1645–1969 "Puerto Rico, registros parroquiales, 1645–1969", database with images, *FamilySearch* (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:WH45-Y93Z: 9 April 2020).

5 "Don Pedro Lasalle, Retirado de la Compañía de los Milicias Urbanas", Caja 547, Serie: Municipalidades—Moca, Fondo de Gobernadores Españoles Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Transcripción, Walter Cardona Bonet, Listas de Milicias Urbanas revisado, Sociedad Puertorriqueña de Genealogía.

6 "Lassales, Pedro, Frances, Oficio Labrador Cap 13 Residencia Moca, Fecha Natur 30/06/1816"; GOB 115A 00/00/1816 NA1816 198–199; 264. (Rosario Rivera 1995).

descendants were elite free people of color in Moca who, unlike Leoncia, were involved in education, business, and local government.[7]

6. Hacienda Palmar Llano: Backdrop to Leoncia Lassalle's Early Life

Leoncia Lasalle mentioned being enslaved on a Lasalle plantation in Moca, which was a *cafetalera*, a site devoted to raising coffee, and was later devoted to sugar; women and children were involved in the early phase of planting sugarcane. Work arrangements on coffee plantations were different than on sugar plantations in terms of the schedule of planting and harvest, with many duties undertaken by female labor. Coffee picking was seasonal work that lasted two or three months. Distant haciendas built c*uarteles de peones* or *barracones*, buildings that both housed and locked in laborers overnight. The bean was processed to strip it of its shell, fermented, and dried, then roasted, bagged, and carried off to market. Over time, each phase of coffee production went from processing by hand to some form of mechanization. See Figures 5 and 6.



Figure 5. Municipality of Moca, Puerto Rico. The hacienda of the Lassalle family was located on the border between Barrios Rocha and Capa, as indicated by the oval. Map adapted from Boricua online.com.

[7] Juan Antonio Lassalle, Death Certificate. "Puerto Rico, Registro Civil, 1805–2001," database with images, *FamilySearch* (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVJX-KWQX: 14 October 2019),; citing Moca, Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico Departamento de Salud and Iglesia Catolica (Puerto Rico Department of Health and Catholic churches), Toa Alta.



Figure 6. From Hazard's *Cuba With Pen and Pencil*. While the woman closest to the frame of the image on the left wears a full dress, several women work wearing only a skirt. "Coffee Sorters, Cuba, ca. 1866", *Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora*, accessed 31 July 2020, http://slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/872.

As imagery depicting these tasks on Puerto Rico is rare, an account from Cuba lends an idea of how some of this labor after harvesting was performed by women. Author Samuel Hazard visited Cuba about 1866, and illustrates the process of sorting coffee beans, here done by enslaved women of different ages, who chant as they work. In *Cuba With Pen and Pencil* he writes: "Great care is used in sorting so as to secure the best of coffee, free from dirt, pebbles, and decayed berries. This is done by the Negro women ... They are arranged on two sides of a long table, in a well-lighted room ... twenty or thirty of these women ... picking away from the great piles of beans before them, and filling huge baskets with the bright green grain, keeping up all the time a monotonous chanting, in which each one takes a part (p. 488)."

Many of the enslaved female laborers that appear in the *cedulas* of the 1870 *Registro de Esclavos* worked in coffee cultivation, harvesting, and sorting, and in the early phases of the growing and processing of sugar cane (Fernandez-Sacco 2019a). The cultivation of sugar expanded rapidly once the United States took possession of the colony after the Spanish American War of 1898.

In 1847, Lassalle's farm, *Palmar Llano* in Rocha, consisted of some ten acres for his main crop, worked by seven enslaved people; the largest area, 182 acres, was pasture. This was a small coffee farm in comparison to that of larger plantation owners, such as Francisco Acevedo, who had some 49 acres worked by 29 enslaved people and 25 salaried laborers, or Juan Pellot, who had 85 acres, 105 enslaved persons, and no salaried labor working the *cafetal*. By this time, Leoncia Lassalle was in her teens and would soon labor on several different plantations. See Figure 7.

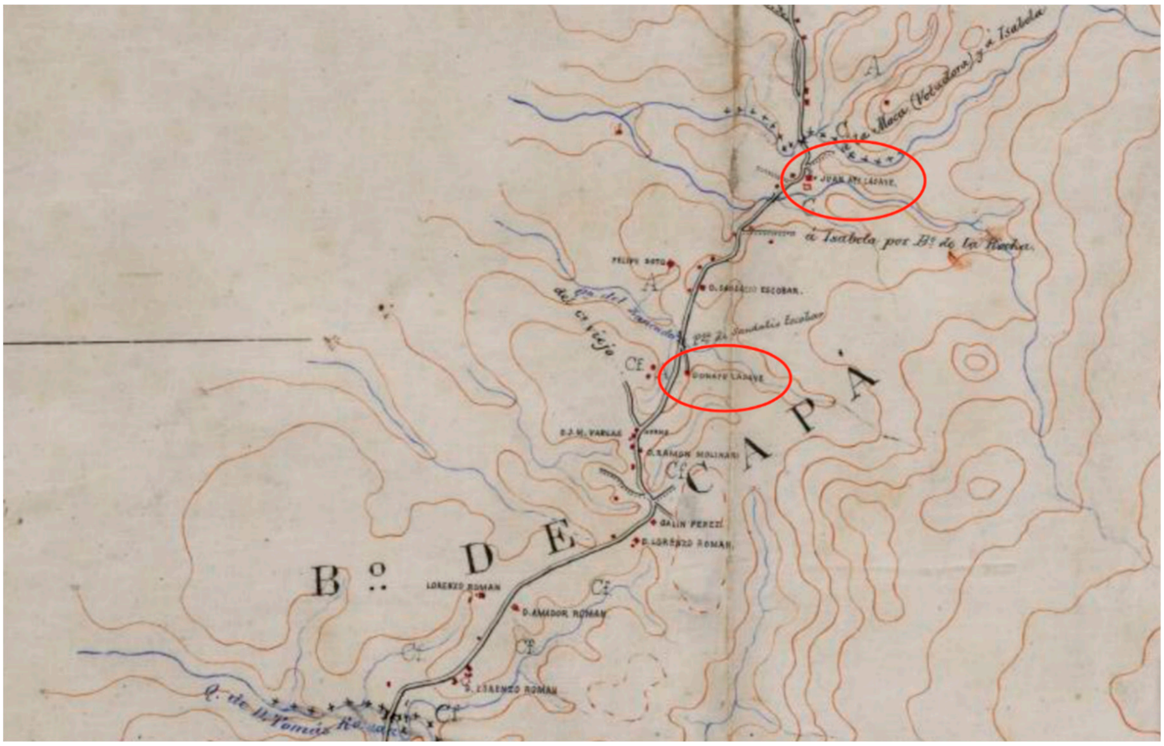


Figure 7. Map of Barrio Capa, Moca: in this 1901 military map, the oval annotations indicate locations of haciendas for 2 Lasalle descendants, Juan Bta. Lassalle and Donato Lasalle, a century after their ancestor originally established a coffee plantation there. Num. 22 Mapa Militar de la Isla, Comision topographico 1889, Itinerario: San Sebastian a Moca, 1901. ADNPR.net.

A number of plantations in northwest Puerto Rico were involved with raising the luxury crops of coffee, sugar, and tobacco for export. In Moca, land ownership involved growing export and subsistence crops with small numbers of enslaved persons and laborers called *peons*, who provided the labor. Often the historical record can reduce these persons to numbers, with some details surviving in parish and notarial documents. It is important to note that, relative to other locations that employed chattel slavery, the numbers of enslaved persons in Puerto Rico are fewer when compared to Brazil or Cuba, as shown in Table 1. While this did not lessen or curtail treatment of those in bondage, this number instead provides a potential space for a kind of nostalgia that erases the brutality of enslavement for the pro-slavery elite. Such a position enhances the notion of racial hierarchy and reinforced *blanqueamiento*, the ideology that heroized white identity and discouraged identification with the enslaved. Such differential relationships ripple into the present over a century later to inform social relations and social hierarchies in which Puerto Rican racism and colorism are embedded (Negron Portillo and Mayo Santana 2007). Relationships were indeed complex, and made a difference for survival, nurturance, and resistance. See Table 1.

The plantations mentioned in Leoncia Lasalle's accounts were contiguous, located in the barrios of Capa and Rocha of Moca, regions that to the west border the municipality of San Sebastian, and in Lares, a barrio that became a separate municipality when it subdivided from San Sebastian in 1835. Moca's population grew in 1824 to 3539 and by 1828 to 5906. Pedro Tomas de Cordova noted the population there in 1824 comprised "3607 whites, 287 pardos, 75 [free] black, 1312 sharecroppers, and 625 slaves." More enslaved females than men were born: 3028 to 2878. "In 1830, 314 were born, 142 died, and 48 [enslaved] persons were married" (Nieves Mendez 2008). Among them are communities of people that Leoncia was born into and grew up among.

Table 1. Comparison of Enslaved and Free Populations.

Colony/Nation (Year)	Enslaved	Free POC	%Free POC
Cuba (1880)	199,885	267,547	57.4
Puerto Rico (1872)	31,635	251,709 [1]	88.8
Barbados (1833–1834)	82,802	6584	7.4
Jamaica (1834)	310,000	42,000	11.9
United States (1860)	3,953,760	488,070	11.0
United States [Southern States] (1860)	3,953,696	261,918	6.2
Brazil (1870)	1,510,806	4,245,428	73.7

[1] Adapted from Table 1, Winston James, Afro-Puerto Rican Radicalism in the United States: Reflections on the Political Trajectories of Arturo Schomburg and Jesus Colon." *CENTRO: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies,* 8:1&2, 1996, 97. (James 1996).

When emancipation passed in 1872, over 31,600 were left enslaved on the island, a system that took over another decade to end. Next, sugar and coffee cultivation expanded over the course of Leoncia's life, with the intensification of sugar cultivation accelerating after the Spanish American War of 1898. By 1917, Puerto Ricans were granted US citizenship, and the start of World War I brought the draft and opportunities to move to the mainland U.S. The movement was cyclical, visible in the movement of Leoncia Lasalle's grandchildren to large cities stateside—before and after the Second World War, and the Korean, Vietnam, and Middle Eastern Wars that continued from the 1940s to 1980s. Like many older *Boricuas*, her granddaughter Virginia Arocho returned with her family to Puerto Rico to spend her retirement years there, completing the cycle of *vaiven* (the coming and going to and from the island). Yet for her grandmother's generation, some women out of bondage opted to move away from the municipalities they were born in for a variety of reasons, often taking their skills in the service industry to live and work in large metropolitan areas such as San Juan, Mayaguez, or Ponce. Regardless, they also carried memories of the world of enslaved labor with them.

Near the end of the Second World War, in the weeks between September and October 1945, the historian Luis Diaz Soler traveled northwest to Moca's Barrio Pueblo to conduct interviews for his book, *Historia del esclavitud negra en Puerto Rico*, the first extensive history of slavery in Puerto Rico. There, Leoncia Lasalle told him that according to her count, she had just turned 112 years of age, and her daughter, Juana Rodriguez, was 85. Leoncia worked various haciendas around the island and at the end of her life, lived in Barrio Pueblo of Moca.

Unlike the testimonials of the WPA Project across several southern states, this record is unique: two lone female voices, mother and daughter, from Northwest Puerto Rico. It was the words of Leoncia's daughter, Juana Rodriguez, that gave a sense of the demands placed on enslaved women in domestic and field service in Puerto Rico. She describes the routine of labor on the plantation: "At four in the morning, everyone was already up to start work. At six, the mayordomo blew the conch shell and everyone came out to work, and at seven at night he blew it again to come and eat." (Diaz-Soler 2002). Leoncia Lasalle and her daughter offers us a glimpse of what their lives were like as enslaved female agricultural laborers. See Figure 8.



Figure 8. Bartolo Arocho Matias & Herminia Gonzalez Hernandez of Pueblo, Moca, P.R. Bartolo was the brother of Mauricio Arocho Matias, husband of Juana Rodriguez Lassalle. ca. 1940s. Courtesy of Lic. Lorenzo Caban Arocho and family; photo taken by author, 2007.

7. Calle Salsipuedes: Community, Post-Slavery, and Kin

Foregrounding the interdependence of people and social ties that helped Leoncia Lasalle and Juana Rodriguez Lasalle through adversity moves away from a conventional individualism to instead read their archival presence "against the grain". By using a microhistorical approach, their family and local history reveals the political elements—the omissions, distortions, and invisible violence—embedded in the scant documentation of their lives that survives (Peabody 2012). The transition from enslavement to freedom shaped their lives, the communities they lived in, and the trajectory of their family histories. As *libertas* (freedwomen), they negotiated contracts that were part of the three-year emancipation process, an apprenticeship that perpetuated the exploitation of former slaves and placed constraints on family life. This was also an opportunity to renegotiate family roles and affirm a right to a private life that precedes their appearance in census records (Rodriguez-Silva 2005; Figueroa 2005). In the decades after the 1870s, social change altered social networks that extended and defied both legal prescriptions and extra-familial blood relationships. At times, these fused in the reality of relationships and the children that resulted from them. The range of responses in a given community went from callous disregard to (less often) loving acknowledgement and support, via extended family and kin.

Liberto families had women at their center, who worked as laundresses and cooks for several households, and contributed earnings to the household of their employer. These jobs required flexibility and physical mobility, and records reveal that both women continued similar work decades after emancipation. The labor they performed challenged and manipulated elite ideas around gender, domesticity, and who was in charge of the home. They negotiated a shifting terrain of legislation aimed at controlling the formerly enslaved, as they pushed to reconstitute their networks of family and kin (Rodriguez-Silva 2005). After 1898, they navigated the change that arrived in the wake of the Spanish American War, and like many in Moca, declared allegiance to the United States in 1900. Leoncia Lasalle

and her daughter did not stay in the rural wards of the Northwest, but at some point moved south and became part of the community of Barrio Pueblo, Moca. Their story did not end with slavery.

Calle Salsipuedes sat as the hub of much of these interactions, a street literally named "Get Out If You Can". On one end, it began across from the *la Iglesia Nuestra Senora de la Monserrate* on the other side of the Plaza, and the street had a small jail in the middle and the *Cementerio Municipal Viejo* at the end. The street's continuum of church, site of incarceration, and cemetery began a century earlier and lasted until the early 1950s, when a new municipal cemetery was built further out from the center of town. A map drafted in 1947 shows the streets, many of them finally paved during that decade.

Over a century before, in the years after emancipation, many persons with ties to the coffee, sugar, and fruit plantations also moved to barrio Pueblo. Some no longer worked the fields, and instead provided services within the town's middling and well to do households, such as childcare, cooking, laundry, and dressmaking. Extended families lived in one home or homes adjacent to each other, sharing the tasks that came with caring for family. Barrio Pueblo held the largest concentration of people within a node of streets, stores, homes, and services that links to larger towns of Aguadilla and Mayaguez to the west, and San Sebastian and Lares to the east. Its population remains relatively small today, about 48,000 people. Within a radius of five to forty miles, Aguadilla, Mayaguez, and Ponce offered growing port facilities that exported commodities with more value than San Juan, and Aguadilla was close to matching the volume of exports that left the capital (Bergad 1983). The proximity to the ports of Aguadilla and Mayaguez afforded opportunities to make a living and advance in the social hierarchy, advantages that, to a degree, also extended to surrounding municipalities. (Rodriguez-Silva 2005) Moca remained a point in between for the harvesting and preparation of coffee and sugar to be shipped out to the closest ports on the west side of the island for another twenty years.

In 1910, Leoncia Lasalle (recorded in the census as Dionisia Lasalle), lived next door to her daughter Juana Rodriguez Lasalle (1878–aft 1945) and her husband Mauricio Arocho Matias (1872–1960).[8] They, like many families, lived in close proximity. Mauricio Arocho worked as a *bracero* or agricultural labor in 1910 before becoming a bread maker at Antonio Egipciaco's market in about 1918. Included in their household were two sons that Juana had before her marriage to Mauricio, Victor and Rito Padilla Rodriguez. Together with Mauricio, she bore seven more children, born between 1904 to 1920. Virginia Arocho Rodriguez, whose photograph appears at the outset of this article, was the last child born to the couple in 1920.

Then nearing age 60, Dionicia Leoncia Lassalle cared for a grandson, Pascual. A decade later at age 70, she was still working as a laundress according to the 1920 census, an occupation that required women to wash clothing on rocks in the creeks that threaded the area from the river Culebrinas. Even here, one finds more familial connections; among the laundresses that labored here was my grandmother and her sisters. Like many women in Moca, they were involved in service work in Barrio Pueblo that enabled them to maintain their families, often without the presence of a male head of household. They also shared and taught each other marketable skills—seamstress, laundress, childcare provider, and candy and food preparation—that were an advantage in a town setting. In researching further, what I found were marriages that interconnected families over generations. These unions appear alongside numbers of female headed households that shaped the lives and narratives of family members and their extended families, whose composition changed in response to illness or death, momentarily visible in the census. Glimpses of their lives are threaded through the folios of Moca's Civil Register, beginning in 1885, and in the pages of the United States Federal Census between 1910–1940.

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[8] "United States Census, 1910," database with images, *FamilySearch* (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:VWKY-T2S: accessed 29 May 2020), Pascual Lasalle in household of Dionisia Lasalle, Moca, Moca, Puerto Rico; citing enumeration district (ED) ED 336, sheet 3A, family 31, NARA microfilm publication T624 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1982), roll 1772; FHL microfilm 1,375,785.

In 1930, Dionicia Leoncia Lasalle's grandnieces—two of the three Arocho Gonzalez sisters—Bienvenida and Longina Arocho were renowned for their skills as dressmakers and for their lacemaking and cooking. Their mother, Herminia Gonzalez Hernandez (1882–1955) was a *costurera*, a dressmaker who made shirts and pants for workers. They lived just down the street from Mauricio's brother, Bartolo Arocho Matias, who, over three decades, appears as a witness on many death certificates in Moca's *Registro Civil*. By signing on the behalf of informants, he assisted many unable to read and write to complete a vital document. His signature appears next to their name, which he wrote on either side of an X, and appended was the line, "*firmo por el declarante no saber*" ("signed for the informant did not know how"). The line appears frequently, an indication that few were able to write and read in this rural area at the time. By acting as a witness, together with his work as a barber, Bartolo Arocho had an inside track on local events and policy changes, information that could prove useful for the network of services that were provided or recommended by those he knew.

Additional ties to past enslavement were very much present. Marriages were performed by Miguel A Babilonia Talavera as *Juez de Paz*, the Justice of the Peace. His brother Tomas A Babilonia Talavera served as Judge overseeing vital records, and he felt obligated to add, amend, or challenge the information provided by the inhabitants of the municipality, ensuring that social boundaries based on color were maintained. Both men are my great-great uncles, descendants of a family of enslavers during the 1800–1850s. The descendants of their father's union with an enslaved woman lived in Barrios Cruz and Pueblo, as did descendants of those they once enslaved, and interactions occurred daily, even if they refused to acknowledge these ties themselves. Life provided additional chances for connections between the Babilonia, Arocho, Lassalle, Pellot and Bourdon families to happen, whether these former connections were acknowledged or not, facilitated by the close proximity of these families to one another at the heart of town.

Until the 1960s, the streets near the Plaza, between the church, the jail, and the cemetery in Moca, were lined with wood houses, each filled with overlapping networks of relationships, many of which defied the neat categories for gender roles within the information in the folios of the Civil Registration. Additional connections exist to the clusters of Bourdon and Lassalle families that moved south to the town center from the barrios of Rocha and Capa where Marcelino Lassalle had his plantation. Here in Barrio Pueblo, a generation of those formerly enslaved found employment apart from the grind of agricultural labor. For a half century after 1900, much of the available work for women remained service work or piece work, thanks to a burgeoning garment industry; some continued to work in the fields for agricultural *hacendados*, particularly in coffee. (Ortiz 1996) In 1930, Dionicia Leoncia Lasalle continued working as a laundress, and her daughter Juana Rodriguez Lassalle worked as a cook in the local school cafeteria. Other local women and their families took up lacemaking, dressmaking, and piecework for the then rapidly growing garment industry.

8. How Do We Know What We Know? The Family History and Genealogy of Leoncia Lasalle and Juana Rodriguez Lasalle

A search for documentation on the family history and genealogy of Leoncia Lasalle and Juana Rodriguez Lasalle quickly runs into problems. Discrepancies in names and ages exist and can increase across record sets going back in time to make specific years of birth doubtful, compounded by rough estimates and the rounding off of ages. Leoncia made use of her first and middle names (Dionisia Leoncia) across different documents, which afforded her a degree of freedom on her own terms and could be read as a potential site of resistance to the state's process of surveillance. The process of resolving discrepancies to produce a consistent historical narrative can reveal the proximity of the state on the lives of those involved (Zeuske 1997; Wamba-dia-Wamba 1986).

Before freedom, the system and practice of enslavement intentionally aimed to maintain an incomplete social identity. Documentation was itself a statement of social disenfranchisement addressed by gradual emancipation, from the inventories assembled from the stipulations of the Moret Law's *Registro de esclavos* of 1870 to a recognition of citizenship with the implementation of the

Registro Civil of 1885. By 1886, the status of slavery officially ended. Despite these social challenges, many people had ties to slavery, both to the enslaved and to the enslaver, who often continued holding posts in local government. Landowners remained in control over the change in the island's dominion from Spain to the United States, and this was true of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic (Ayala and Bergad 2002).

This older landscape of labor shaped the Puerto Rico of the 1940s. Most of the people that Lasalle mentions belong to another time and are for the most part deceased, which enables her and her daughter to speak freely about them. Lasalle mentions D. Marcelino Lasalle, and there were two men with this name in Rocha, father and son. There was D. Marcelino Engracia Lassalle Delpeche (bca 1805–ca 1875), married to Da. Angelina Zavala; they named their fifth child Marcelino (1857–1907). In the 1840s, the couple owned *Hacienda San Rafael* (*Palmar Llano*), a commercial coffee farm comprised of lands in the barrios of Rocha and Capa in Moca, originally established by Pedro Lassalle, as noted earlier. Marcelino Lassalle Sr. inherited the plantation from his father, Pedro Lassalle, sometime around 1848. By the time when Leoncia Lasalle gives her account in 1945, a century later, she mentions that the hacienda was a sugar plantation, and many in Moca continued to survive by working sugar and coffee on these lands decades later. Tracing the Lasalle family histories by reexamining relevant record sets offers insight into the trajectory of their lives post-emancipation.

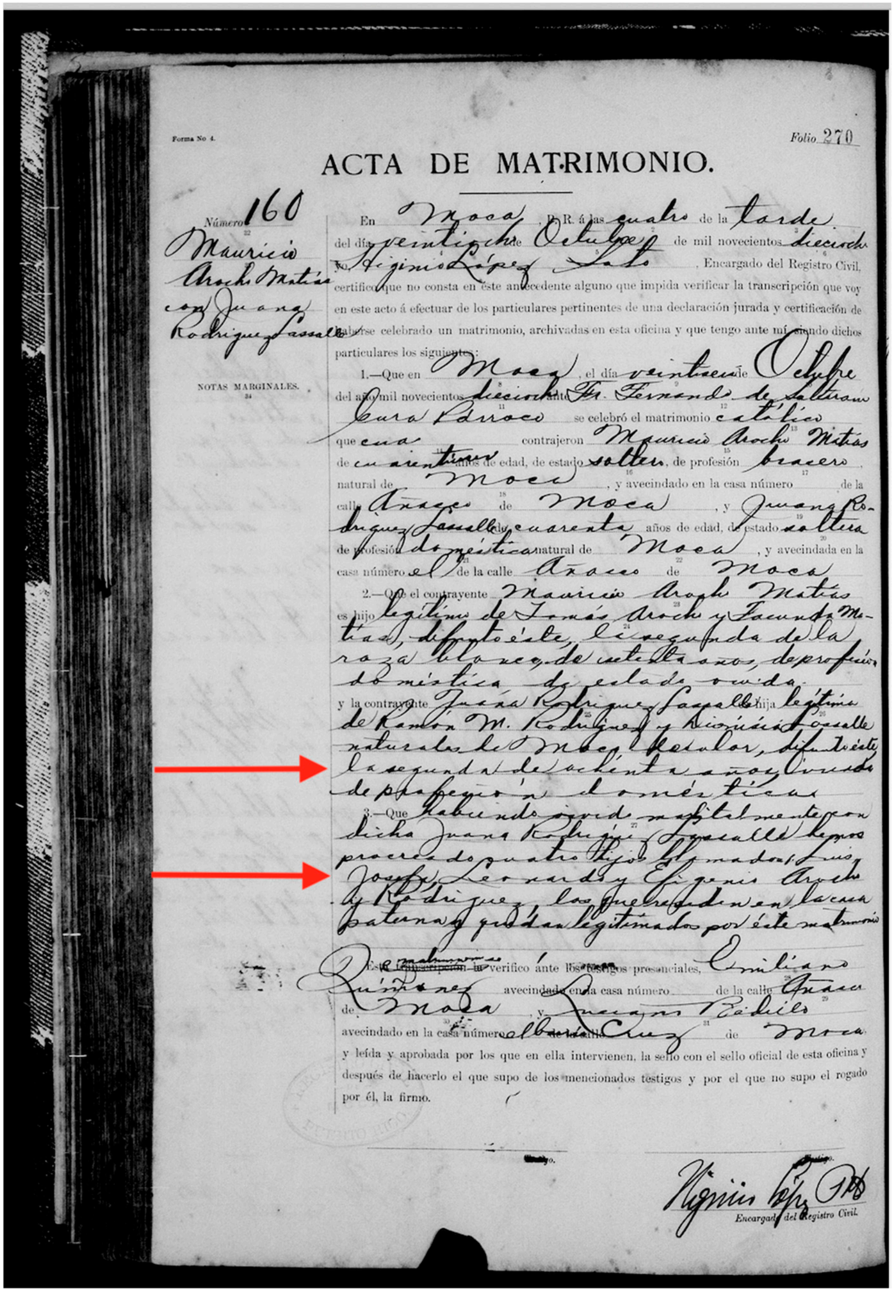
A Question of Maternal Connections

One advantage this testimony offers is more certainty in tracing Juana Rodriguez Lasalle's lineage, thereby alleviating the difficulty of researching a name shared by many: Juana Rodriguez. However, there is another issue that goes to the heart of genealogical practice, regarding the ways that the families of enslaved people were documented. How can we best record the enduring social links that existed, despite their designation as mobile forms of property? Alternative systems of notation are needed, and slowly some genealogical tree building software is providing the means of recreating the complex familial relationships embedded within a slave economy. A flexible means of connecting ancestors is more often achieved by genealogists adapting how the biological and commercial connections are mapped between the families of the enslaver and the enslaved (Smith 2019). As genealogical practice undergoes a process of desegregation, newer methodologies are developed that embrace oral history and DNA testing, and that recognize the embedded nature of structural racism. Researching enslaved ancestors requires a range of techniques and means of interrogating the archive in terms of its contents, inclusions, and absences. The ongoing excavation of archival collections for data on enslaved ancestors also helps in developing various histories on them that lend visibility to the strategies and relationships that helped them survive. The shifting of social beliefs also means this process functions as a confirmation of history and humanity, rather than the problematic of a social disadvantage.

What we are mapping is a creole kinship that "merged slavery's realities, Spain's medieval family law, and paternal loyalty" and is "distinct from either the African or European patterns that preceded it" (Morrison 2007). The complexity increases with the acknowledgement of Indigenous ancestry, although the aim here is not to simply replicate the triumvirate of identities proffered as Puerto Rican. The erasure of specificity begun by Governor Monte's 1808 edict that both reduced complex ethnicities to the colors "*blanco, negro, pardo*" that structured society in Northwest and belied the complexity of admixture that existed across the centuries.

Indigenous patterns of relationships are also part of the blend of Caribbean matrifocal family structures. Many families were fundamentally matrifocal: the mother is at the center of relationships within enslaved and free families (Schwartz 2016). This was complicated by the oppositional tensions inherent in the recognition of bonds by the enslaved and their free descendants versus the recognition or acknowledgement of relationships by law, enslavers, or the dominant culture's social mores. This dynamic also plays out within the pages of the Civil Registration for Puerto Rico that begins in 1885, fifteen years after the process of emancipation began in 1870, and in the census. Residues

of enslaved identities remained in names and surnames such as "*Liberto*" and in daily interpersonal relationships and transactions with the Civil Register (Fernandez-Sacco 2019b). See Figure 9.


Forma No 4. Folio 270

ACTA DE MATRIMONIO.

Número 160

Mauricio Arocho Matias con Juana Rodriguez Lassalle

NOTAS MARGINALES.

En Moca, P. R. á las cuatro de la tarde del día veintiocho de Octubre de mil novecientos dieciocho, Higinio López Soto, Encargado del Registro Civil, certifico que no consta en este antecedente alguno que impida verificar la transcripción que voy en este acto á efectuar de los particulares pertinentes de una declaración jurada y certificación de haberse celebrado un matrimonio, archivadas en esta oficina y que tengo ante mí, siendo dichos particulares los siguientes:

1.—Que en Moca, el día veinticinco de Octubre del año mil novecientos dieciocho, Fr. Fernando de Salteras Cura Párroco se celebró el matrimonio católico que contrajeron Mauricio Arocho Matías de cuarenta años de edad, de estado soltero, de profesión bracero, natural de Moca, y avecindado en la casa número de la calle Anasco de Moca, y Juana Rodriguez Lassalle, cuarenta años de edad, de estado soltera, de profesión doméstica natural de Moca, y avecindada en la casa número el de la calle Anasco de Moca.

2.—Que el contrayente Mauricio Arocho Matías es hijo legítimo de Tomás Arocho y Facunda Matías, difuntos ...

y la contrayente Juana Rodriguez Lassalle hija legítima de Ramon M. Rodriguez y Dionicia Lassalle ...

3.—Que ...

Esta ... se verificó ante los testigos presenciales, ... avecindado en la casa número de la calle ... de Moca ... avecindado en la casa número ... de Moca y leída y aprobada por los que en ella intervienen, la sello con el sello oficial de esta oficina y después de hacerlo el que supo de los mencionados testigos y por el que no supo el rogado por él, la firmo.

Higinio López Soto

Encargado del Registro Civil.

Figure 9. Mauricio Arocho Matias and Juana Rodriguez Lassalle, Marriage Registration, 1918. First arrow indicates name and age of Dionicia Lassalle, 80 in October 1918; the second notes the couple's four children, Luis, Josefa, Leonardo, and Efigenio Arocho Rodriguez. "Puerto Rico, Registro Civil, 1805–2001," database with images, FamilySearch (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVJD-8KVQ: 14 November 2019).

Juana Rodriguez Lassalle was known as "*Juana Pajita*" (Juana the little bird), likely because of her short height, slenderness, and perhaps a high-pitched voice. In 1918, she married Mauricio Arocho Matias and lived in a section of Barrio Pueblo in Moca, not far from the main plaza, just adjacent to the area named "*El Chimbi*". Homes here were largely "*bohios*", smaller houses made largely of palm thatch and slats. Today, the area is gone, now comprised of modest concrete homes built in the 1970s.

Back then, many who lived in the heart of town were people of color who provided the labor for services within the town or worked the sugar or coffee plantations that surrounded Moca. Mauricio and Juana knew most of them, and a range of relationships defined these extended families.

The record for Juana Rodriguez Lassalle's marriage with Mauricio Arocho Matias (1872–23 May 1960) contains details that fill in the trajectory of their relationship. At the time of their Catholic ceremony, conducted by the parish priest Father Fernando de Salterran, Mauricio Arocho was 46, worked as a *bracero*, an agricultural day laborer, and lived on Calle Anasco in Moca's town center. Juana Rodriguez Lassalle was 40, and at home in adjacent Calle de la Paz caring for the four children born to the couple over the previous years, now officially recognized as legitimate and listed on the marriage document: Luis, Josefa, Leonardo, and Efigenio Arocho y Rodriguez. Her parents are also listed, differently than noted in her mother's account: Ramon Marcial Rodriguez, then deceased, and Dionicia Lassalle, age 80, born about 1838. See Figure 10.

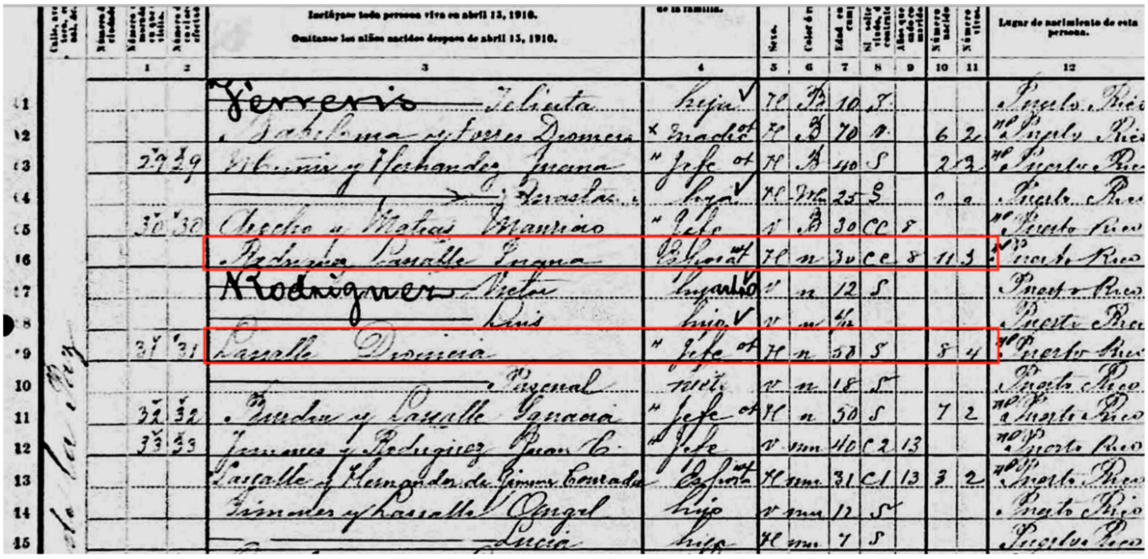


Figure 10. Households of Juana Rodriguez Lassalle, Line 16, and Dionicia [Leoncia] Lassalle, Line 19. Calle de la Paz, Barrio Pueblo, Moca, 1910 US Federal Census. United States Census, 1910, database with images, FamilySearch (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:VWKB-4H3: accessed 15 January 2020), Luis Rodriguez in household of Mauricio Arocho Y Matías, Moca, Moca, Puerto Rico; citing enumeration district (ED) ED 336, sheet 3A, family 30, NARA microfilm publication T624 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1982), roll 1772; FHL microfilm 1,375,785.

Beyond the oral history recorded in Diaz Soler, there is no specific mention of Juana's biological father, the son of Manuel Gonzalez, a relationship Leoncia Lasalle clearly recognized as a futile pursuit and a situation beyond her control. Many women who transitioned out of enslavement continued to maintain female-headed households. According to the Civil Register, Juana Rodriguez Lassalle's [step]father was Ramon Marcial Rodriguez. Other records show he was listed as the husband of Leonicia Bourdon Lassalle, who died just a year shy of 100 years of age in 1931 and lived in Barrio Pueblo. The proximity of Leonicia Bourdon Lassalle to Dionisia Leoncia Lasalle's family also speaks to shared experience—both lived in Barrio Rocha when younger, were possibly blood relatives, if not kin, and after death, shared a partner. As a neighbor, Mauricio Arocho was the informant on her death certificate.[9] Given the document dates, Ramon Marcial Rodriguez, born in about 1827, died before 1915. Despite extensive searching, his record remains to be located.

9 "Puerto Rico, Registro Civil, 1805–2001," database with images, *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVJD-NXLM: 19 November 2019), Ramon Marcial Rodriguez in entry for Leonicia Bourdón Lassalle; citing Moca, Puerto

Available documentation includes the birth records for Mauricio and Juana's children in the Civil Register and the 1910 US Federal census for Barrio Pueblo, which shows the couple had kept house since 1902. The census shows them in a common law relationship rather than the ideal of the visiting relationship that involved separate households and conformed to local mores, as reflected in their marriage document of eight years later. This suggests how the couple navigated the expectations of church and state for their domestic relationship.

The transition from bondage to freedom for Leoncia Lasalle and her daughter Juana Rodriguez provided them with an opportunity to leave the life of an agricultural laborer in a rural area for service work in the center of town and some control over the trajectory of their own lives. Their accounts of enslavement, captured 72 years after emancipation, lend a sense of a condition quite different than the paternalistic accounts by the pro-slavery supporters of a century before, such as George Flinter. His 1834 book, *An Account of the Present State of the Island of Puerto Rico*, states: "The slaves in the Spanish colonies have always enjoyed great comfort and happiness, as compared with their conditions in the colonies of other nations ... The Spanish laws were on the same humane basis on which they are to this day, from the commencement of importation of Africans ... " (Flinter 2002). Such ideas remain in circulation today.

9. Conclusions

Reconstructing family history for those before and after slavery is a process fraught with multiple considerations and questions regarding access, availability, and location. Genealogy's origins as a practice over a century ago are bound to eugenics and the reinforcement of a "white" identity, elements to be overcome when working on enslaved ancestors. This requires knowing more about the practices of recording and inventory of enslaved individuals and populations, valuing oral history, and evaluating various municipal, ecclesiastic, and legal documents for details to excavate local histories, so that these skills become essential to understanding their situations and writing them back into history, a practice that increasingly becomes a community effort. To simply rely on the civil documents alone to tell their story is to miss the weight and details of the women's oral testimony. The recognition of the women's account as part of the literary tradition of the slave narrative creates a larger network of connections to lived experience that goes well beyond the island. It reconnects an experience shared by millions who transitioned out of bondage as part of the history of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Sociologist Elaine B. Pinderhughes' recognition of the impact of this experience, described in "Black Genealogy: Self liberator and therapeutic tool" (1982), acknowledges the complexity and promise of understanding "how racism and exploitation have caused ignorance, gaps and confusion to exist, and information to be missing concerning the realities of Black people's presence" (Pinderhughes 1982). Their humanity and the content of their lives exceeds the documentation. By blending microhistory, genealogy, oral history, and ecclesiastic and legal documents, we can glimpse their lives and strategies for negotiating freedom. As Black women within a racially hierarchical society, over the decades their legal status shifted, as they survived to find a way out of no way.

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Rico, Puerto Rico Departamento de Salud and Iglesia Catolica (Puerto Rico Department of Health and Catholic churches), Toa Alta.

Appendix A. Leoncia Lasalle's Account in Luis Diaz Soler's Historia de la Esclavitud Negra en Puerto Rico (1953)

1. Yo me crié en la hacienda de Don Marcelino Lassalle por allá por los campos de Moca. Trabajaba en la cana desde chiquitita. Me levantaba a las cuatro de la mañana, como todo el mundo y a trabajar se ha dicho hasta las tantas de la noche. A la hora de almuerzo, nos traían las viandas y el bacalao. Y volvíamos a la pieza de cana hasta las siete más o menos. A esa hora, comíamos harina con habichuelas y sí teníamos suerte, un poquito de arroz, aunque lo que habia casi siempre era sancocho ralo y platano hervido. Y después nos tirábamos a dormir de los acabados y esmolios que estábamos.
2. Don Marcelino estaba enviciao con el juego. Ese hombre no tenia cabeza pa mas na. En una, perdió de mala manera y le dio con cederme a mi pago por la deuda. Me toco un amo bien sinverguenza y abusador, Don Soto Rosado de Lares. Tan malo era que, por habérseme quebrao unos sorullitos que estaba friendo, mando que me dieran el castigo de la paleta. Si eso era por unos sorullitos, figurase como seria el castigo si por pienso le quemaba una camisa!
3. Por suerte o por desgracia, el tal Don Soto me vendió a Don Manuel Gonzalez en cien pesos. Le salí barata porque yo sabia hacer de to, en la cana y en la casa. El hijo de Don Manuel, viéndome tan jovencita y tan desarrolla, se aprovecho de mí y me hizo el daño. Eso antes era así: una tenia que complacer al amo en to lo que se antojara, porque no se metía una en líos. Salí encinta y tuve una nena bien parecido, eso sí, sabe. El tenia muchísimas atenciones con ella. Yo se lo agradezco. Los favores se agradecen siempre.
4. Otras negras que salieron encinta de blancos, les reclamaban y como si con ellos no fuera! Total, ellas eran las que tenían que mantener y criar los hijos. Yo por eso nunca le reclame. Que me diera lo que le diera la gana y si no, que no me diera na. Lo único que me hubiera gustao era la libertad para mí y pa la nena. Y eso nunca nos lo dio . . . .
5. p154 n14.: Juana Rodriguez Lasalle, hija de Leoncia Lasalle, esclava que fue de don Marcelino Lasalle . . . Leonicia declaro que "a las cuatro de la manana ya todos se levantaban pa' empezar el trabajo. A las seis, el mayordomo tocaba el caracol, y todos salian al trabajo, y a las siete de la noche lo tocaba otra vez para venirse a comer.
6. p161 n.41 confesaron que en dicha hacienda el amo ofrecia de almuerzo "viandas y soruyo y medio. Eran los soruyos como el brazo mio, y luego una pedazo de bacalao asao . . . ; por la tarde nos daban en al comida harina con habichuelas, y algunas veces nos daban arroz. Lo mas que se comia era salcocho y platanos, asao o cocido."

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